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Open Support Openly Given

The Katzenbach committee's recommendation that no Federal agency shall henceforth provide any covert financial assistance to educational or private voluntary organizations—and President Johnson's prompt order to turn the recommendation into national policy—should bring an end to an unhappy chapter of ill-considered, though well-intentioned, official policy.

Disclosure of the Central Intelligence Agency's secret subsidies for the international activities of the National Student Association and a host of other legitimate voices of American educational and intellectual life severely distorted the image of independence of American scholarship abroad. The real fault lay in the shortsightedness in Congress and the nation at large which, during a critical time in the battle of ideas, prevented open support of such organizations. The corrosive influence of McCarthyism, which made for widespread anti-intellectualism, effectively held back public support for many private groups that combined anti-Communism with reform-minded liberalism.

The Katzenbach committee accurately observed that the American public has, since those dark days, become sufficiently aware of the need for providing open backing of American representatives taking part in the international competition of ideas. Its recommendation that the Government support participation in this competition "in a mature, open manner" calls for prompt execution.

The proposal of a "public-private mechanism," financed in considerable degree with public funds but independently administered, has worked in Britain with the British Council and here with the Smithsonian Institution. And the acceptance of Fulbright scholars by the international academic community is additional proof that governmental money is in no way tainted when it is openly allocated.

The only flaw in the President's response to the recommendation that a new committee provide a blueprint for the projected public-private agency is his appointment of the Secretary of State to chair this group. This goes counter to earlier pledges, under the International Education Act of 1966, to shift responsibility for the nation's educational involvement abroad from the State Department to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

The American educational and intellectual voice speaks most effectively when there is least suspicion that it is being prompted by the agents of foreign policy. Now that a break with past covert operations has been made, the opportunity to move the responsibility for education's foreign activities into H.E.W. should not be missed.